



A Story For Every Category I : Mystery



mystery thriller drama

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Chapter 1 by intellikat

I climbed from that battered Nissan Sentra into the deepening heat of a southern sun, covering my nose with a sleeveless arm to fend off the stench of fresh tarmac wafting through the haze of thick automobile exhaust. All around me cars crept like ancient beetles, armoring their passengers from the self-imposed suffering to which I had willingly admitted myself.

"Come on, give me a hand," said the man who must have guessed why I stood there. He was mid-forties; muscular and tanned beneath a dripping guayabera shirt that was popular at the time.

I joined him behind the stalled vehicle.

"Do you still have it in gear?!" shouted the man to the woman at the wheel of the stalled vehicle.

"No-- it's in neutral."

"Jesus Christ," swore the man, mopping his forehead with a meaty hand. "Women..."

I shouldered myself into position at the rear of the hatchback and the two of us began to push

the car off the highway and onto the shoulder. From air-conditioned comfort, our fellow motorists looked on.

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The man nodded in the direction of a dark Suburban to which a trailer carrying a sailboat was hitched.

"You sail?"

I shook my head no. "Mountains."

He laughed. "Well, we've got the best of both worlds in this state, don't we?"

"To be honest, I've never really given it a fair shot. I learned to sail at camp as a kid. Little Sunfish, Devilfish... you know. Pretty fun, actually."

"There's nothing like it. I mean... there's sex, right? But sailing? Well... most fun you can have with your sandals on." He paused. "You're not from Mason County are you?"

"How did you guess that?"

"That's your beat-up piece of shit, isn't it?" He was nodding toward my beat-up piece off shit alright. "Not the girl inside. She's beautiful. And I don't take you for the abusive type."

I laughed. "Yeah, that's... my classic alright. The car, that is." Gwen waved from within the car and I nodded back.

"Saw the county tag on it."

"You from Mason?"

"Yeah. Off 42."

"Where do you sail out there?"

"Nuclear power plant. Lake around the Reserve. Yeah, I know. It's not the coast. And there aint no clams. But like I said, I gotta have it. We moved there two years ago for my job."

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I shook and told him my name.

"You're gonna be near the isle?"

"Yeah, my girlfriend and I."

"Hey. Why don't you come see my wife and I. We'll take the sloop out. Cook on the beach." He handed me a small, grey business card. "Give me a call when you get in. I assume you're here the long weekend? I-- hope that's not too forward. I don't want to interrupt your plans, but if you have the time and feel like it? We've got a gorgeous townhouse overlooking the water. Very private. Very fun. Great sound system. Fully stocked bar. Netflix. Hulu. Apple TV."

I laughed. "Yeah. That sounds great. We're staying at a real shithole. We're both grad students."

"Hey! Done, then." He shook my hand again. "Just text me."

Thom Rand was returning to his Suburban and I was returning to my Sentra when the woman whose car we had pushed off the road stopped me.

"Do you know that man?" she asked, leaning from her window.

"Well-- we just met... now."

She paused. "He-- he said something to me before you came."

I waited, half-turned in the road.

"I thought I was hearing things, but-- I'm sorry."

"What? What did he say?"

"Just-- something awful. He threatened me. For my car stalling!" Her face was quivering now.

"Oh. Are you sure? Maybe he was just a bit..."

"I'm sure of it."

"Maybe he was just a bit..."

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"He said that if he knew where I was headed, it would be better for me that I just turned around now and went home. Better than if the police found my body floating in the ocean."

I didn't know what to say, and I don't remember what I mumbled to her, but when I got back into the car with Gwen, I do remember looking at the grey business card quickly before flicking it up onto the dashboard.

"That was kind of you, Ben. No one else was offering to help. Who was that man?" she said to me.

"Just... someone. Someone from Mason, too."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

The traffic had begun to flow once again and I shifted into gear. It would be two days later, when my memory of the incident had completely faded, before Thom Rand made contact. I had almost forgotten him when he knocked at our door; and as he stood on the stoop of our small lodging holding a bag of oysters, I wondered how he had found where we were staying.

Chapter 2 by intellikat



The evening's light was fading as Thom Rand's cigar flared hot and orange from the balcony of the townhouse. Both he and I stood overlooking the ocean with full tumblers nearby while the ladies were laughing about something inside.

"Foreign exchange. That's what got me started."

"I don't know much about it," I said, looking at the end of my own cigar and its sharp cone of ash.

"I mean, I know what it is. But I don't know how people like you make so much money doing it."

"It's like so many things in life. It's like predicting the weather."

"Is that the best analogy?"

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"Ha. There are signs you'll find if you're in the right waters. That's all you need."
He turned and looked inside. "It's like with women. If you cast a wide net in the right waters, you'll catch what you need."

He sipped on his drink and we were both silent.

"Oyster's good?" he asked.

"Yeah. Definitely."

"How about we go out on the ocean tomorrow?"

"Oh. Well, Gwen and I--"

"You can both stay here. We have plenty of room. Those two are getting along great."

He waved to his wife and Gwen, who waved back.

"I guess I should ask her what she thinks."

"Why the hell would you do that?" He threw back his tumbler and placed it on the railing. "Are you not man enough to make your own decisions? You set that as the tempo and she'll never respect you-- believe me. If you are serious about this girl. You sure seem to be. Like a puppy dog in love."

He paused for a moment, then let out a laugh.

"Come on. I'm fucking with you. Of course. Ask Gwen what she thinks. Go ahead. I'm gonna refill these."

He took the tumblers and went in. Gwen stepped out.

"This view is amazing," she said. "I don't think I can go back to our timeshare after this."

"He invited us to stay overnight. Go sailing tomorrow."

"What do you think?"

"Well, I thought I would ask you if I should..." [See more of Story Wars](#)

"Why don't you decide?"

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"You don't have an opinion? How's it going with..."

"Sheryl."

"--with Sheryl?"

"She's nice. She's funny. Like my sister."

"Well, why don't we just plan on seeing them sometime back in Mason. I have his number. We can just get back to our time together and see them later."

"What is it?"

"What is what?"

"Is something wrong?"

"Honestly-- I don't know. I just. I get a weird feeling around him. She seems fine. But.. I don't know. Yeah. I don't feel comfortable here."

"Wow, huh. Okay."

The glass door slid open and Thom reappeared with a fresh bottle in one hand.

"All settled then? You'll stay?"

"This has been great, Thom. Thanks so much. But we're gonna call it a night. We'd love to see you back in Mason, if you have the time--"

"No."

His voice cut through mine like a filet knife through a fish. The word hung in the air for a moment and then he burst out laughing again.

"I'm kidding! Okay, sure. You go. We'll see each other again. Sheryl?" He called to his wife. "Can

you make up some doggy bags for these two? They're leaving early."

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"Oh? So soon?" Sheryl gave a playful grin.

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"Yes, I'm sorry. You've been great hosts. We just need to get back in centered the townhouse with Gwen's hand in mine."

"Hey, okay. Before you go, though. Let me show you something."

We were descending to the ground floor and Thom took me by the tricep firmly.

"It will just take a minute."

Tom opened another door leading to a cellar and we descended further into the dark.

"Hang on a sec."

"What are we looking for, Thom?"

"Just hang on."

A series of lights crackled on above and I drew back in surprise.

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